

Escape from Balis-Baurgh

By Paul Balsamo; Illustrations by Doug Shuler

"But why do you have to go away again, Papa?" Ponto asked as I tucked him into his bed.

I looked down at my son and felt like saying that I wasn't going anywhere. I wanted to tell him that I would stay right here with him and his mother in the village of Tribe Panshee, play my flute in the tribal ceremonies, go on the hunt with the other warriors, and listen to stories of how our tribe helped defend Endor from the evil Tribe Empire.

"We've been through this before, Ponto," I began instead. "I have to help Junas rescue his friends from the Tribe Empire place."

"Can't I go with you? Please, please, Papa?" he whined.

"It is too dangerous a journey for a young Ewok." Seeing the hurt look on his little face, I changed tactics. "Besides, I need you to take care of your mother while I'm gone. You never know if Tribe Empire will come back."

"I'll protect her, Papa." Ponto said proudly, pounding a small fist into his chest.

"Thanks Ponto, I know you will. Now off to sleep. We'll say goodbye in the morning."

As I turned to leave, Ponto pleaded, "Tell me the story of the Tribe Empire place, please?"

Although he had heard it all countless times already and I really needed to rest, I couldn't think of anything I'd rather do on my last night in Tribe Panshee village...

* * *

I was on one of my usual solo hunts, about two nights' distance from Tribe Panshee village, when I picked up the scent of a yootak. In a spear-to-claw battle, it would take at least five Panshee warriors to defeat a yootak. For alone warrior to kill one, it would take cunning and intelligence. Luckily, I possess a great deal of both. I decided to set a trap. The area was heavily populated by gunlabirds, a yootak's favorite prey. I caught one of the birds and tethered it to a snare trap in the middle of a clearing. Then, I hid in a nearby bush to wait.

I waited there, watching the Great Trees that guarded the clearing and listened to the song of their leaves swaying in the breeze. Then, I felt the yootak come. I couldn't see it, but the Spirits of the Trees revealed its location to me in their song. The yootak was moving toward its prey at an unusually slow pace. I feared that the yootak had sensed the trap.

Then, something crept out of the trees on the far side of the clearing. It was brown, standing roughly two Ewoks in height. It had patches of black fur and two beady little green eyes. It stopped a short distance from the gunlabird and held out a small, black stick. It was not the yootak.

As I tried to figure out what this creature was, why it was here, and what the little black stick was for, the yootak appeared. It was a hulking mass of green fur, with two long forearms that ended in hooked claws. It had two black eyes set behind a muzzle of razor-sharp teeth. With blinding speed it swung out of a tree and struck the brown creature from behind, sending it sprawling into the clearing. The yootak leapt out of the tree, claws bearing down on its prey. It barely managed to graze the brown thing's back as the creature rolled out of the way at the last moment.

Thinking to slay the yootak while it played with the brown creature, I sprang from my hiding place and charged the beast with my spear. The brown creature tried to stand, but the yootak whipped around and backhanded it across the chest. I had to step sideways to avoid being struck by the brown thing as it sailed toward me in mid air. Unfortunately, I stepped right into my snare trap and was



immediately hanging upside down by my left foot. The yootak reeled back on its hind legs and licked its lips in anticipation.

I took that brief instant to pray to the Spirit of the Tree from which my spear had been made. I leveled the weapon at my enemy. Time froze. I stared into the yootak's eyes and growled menacingly. The yootak stared into my eyes and growled back even more menacingly. I could see the bloodlust in its eyes. Spittle fell from its maw. With a triumphant howl it lunged at me. I raised my spear and aimed at the monster's heart. As spear struck hide, I heard a loud cracking noise and was blinded by a flash of light.

When my vision returned, the yootak lay dead on the ground, smoke rising out of a hole in its chest. My spear must have come from a truly mighty Tree Spirit to have inflicted such damage. I spun around and saw the brown creature standing behind me, waving that stupid black stick. It looked at me in astonishment, probably in awe of my prowess, and dropped to its knees in homage. I cut myself loose with a knife and landed, with a thud, beside the brown thing. I just sat there panting.

Upon closer examination, I realized that the brown thing was actually a mostly tan thing dressed in brown hides. When it tried to stand up, I pointed my spear at it. It raised its arms meekly and then it spoke. Nothing intelligent or anything, but I could tell it was speech of some sort. To this point I had never heard anything but another Ewok ever speak so I didn't know what to make of this strange creature.

It pointed to itself and said slowly, "Ju-nas."

I pointed at it and repeated, "Ju-nas."

I figured it was telling me its name, so I pointed to myself and said, "Grael."

Junas repeated my name. I decided to continue the game and pointed at the dead yootak, "Yoo-tak."

Junas questioned, "Me take?"

I said, "No, yootak."

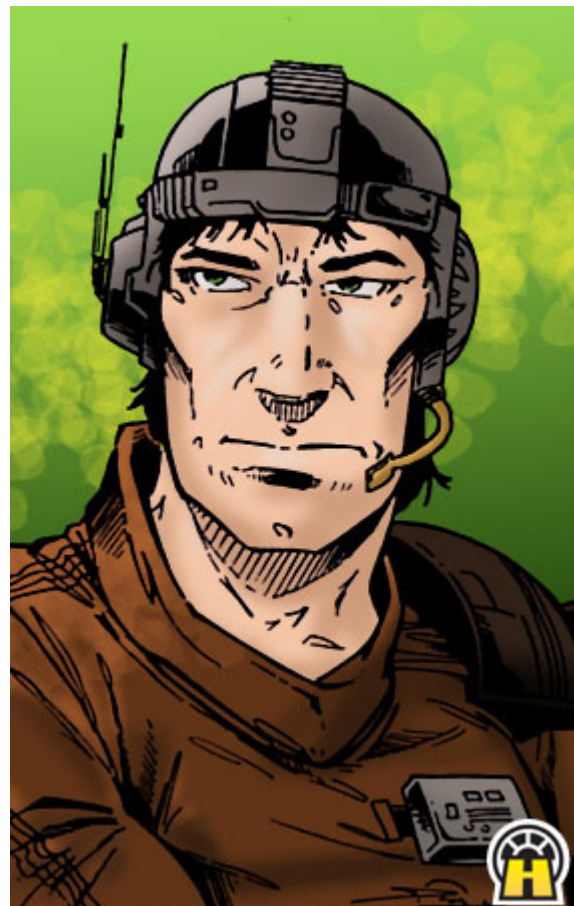
Getting nothing but a blank stare, I repeated loudly, "Yootak!"

Junas looked perplexed and then tried, in a futile effort, to lift the dead animal. I threw up my hands in disgust and began to wonder what to do. At first I thought about killing Junas and seeing what he tasted like. Then it hit me that a talking animal might be some sort of omen. An omen about what I couldn't possibly imagine, but omens weren't meant to be eaten. Following this logic, I concluded that I should bring Junas back to Tribe Panshee village so that Shaman Rakra could explain what this was all about. If Junas wasn't an omen, everyone in the village could see what he tasted like.

It didn't take much to get Junas to come with me. I gave him some water and rations from my pack and he seemed to be content to follow. We traveled till dusk and then stopped to camp for the night. I climbed a suitable Tree and tied my travel hammock to its branches. Junas refused to follow me up the Tree. I tried to warn him of the dangers that lurked on the ground at night, but he seemed too stupid to understand. Instead, Junas spread out a thin tube of hide he got from his pack and climbed inside of it at the base of the tree. He fell asleep clutching that strange black stick in one hand.

We set out for Tribe Panshee village at dawn. I figured we might be able to make it by nightfall if we were lucky. I soon discovered that we weren't. We had only been traveling a short time when I picked up a strange, unnatural odor, like one of Shaman Rakra's experiments gone wrong. The Trees around me sang a song of danger. Junas must have sensed it too because he drew out the black stick again. I readied my spear. We continued forward at a quick pace.

Suddenly, strange bolts of red lightning shot out and hit many of the Trees nearby. I heard a voice call out in a language that I didn't understand and then we were surrounded by creatures holding big black sticks. They looked somewhat like Junas, but were all shiny and white. One of them shouted again. Junas put the black stick on the



ground and raised his hands. He was surrendering. The white things moved in on us, not caring how much I waved my spear. We were captured and our hands were bound within moments. As we were marched away, I wondered if finding a group of talking animals was a bigger omen than finding just one talking animal. Then I wondered if all talking animals would taste the same. Then I wondered if the shiny white talking animals were wondering what Ewoks taste like and if we all taste the same. Then I decided to stop wondering about anything.

We marched for some time until we came upon a village amidst the forest. It was not like any village I had ever seen before. It was certainly not built by Ewoks. There were huge huts made out of shiny black, silver, and white stuff. There were more of the shiny white talking animals and among them were several other shiny creatures of different shapes, sizes, and colors. They were doing all sorts of construction work about the village. Even stranger than the creatures was the fact that the village was built on the ground and not in the safety of the Trees. That's when I realized, there were no Trees! Not even a shrub or a blade of grass. I had never seen so big an area that had no plants.

Then, I heard a painful screeching noise and turned to look where it had come from. At the border between village and forest, I saw a hideous, flat, black creature with long silver arms. At the end of its arms were silver teeth that spun around. The creature was cutting down Trees with its arms and then eating them as each one fell over into its large mouth. I felt a wave of grief wash over me as I realized what was happening. It was cutting down Trees without performing the Ritual of the Children! The Ritual insures that the Spirit of a dying Tree is transferred to a Seed to be reborn. Without the Ritual, the Tree Spirits would be killed.

I had to do something to stop that creature. I struggled to break my bonds, but I couldn't. The shiny white talking animals grabbed me and shoved me into one of the huts. I tried to run back outside to stop the thing from killing more Spirits, but one of the white things bashed my head with something hard and I fell to the ground. I heard a scuffle above me and, a moment later, Junas crumpled to the floor by my side. He must have retaliated for their attack on me. I was starting to like Junas more and more. I felt bad that I had almost decided to eat him earlier.

We were roughly picked up off the floor and marched down a long corridor. We stopped at a silver door. One of the white things touched some symbols on the wall next to the door and the door slid sideways into the wall. They removed my bonds and threw me through the open doorway into a small gray room. As the door slid shut, I realized that I was all alone. The room was empty except for a chair and a long table. There was light, but I saw no fires or windows. I tried for a while to open the door, but I couldn't budge it and there were no symbols on this side of the wall to play with. I sat in the chair, pulled out my reed flute, and began to play a tune.

After a while, I heard a rumbling noise and the whole room began to shake. It felt as though the room was moving. Eventually, the shaking stopped and the rumbling decreased to a low hum that I could barely hear. The door slid open and I saw Junas stumble into the room. He looked bad, like he had been in a fight. He staggered over to the table, fell onto it, and passed out. I climbed up on top of him and went to sleep.

I don't know how long we were in the little gray room, but eventually the door slid open and the white shiny creatures came back. They waved the big black sticks at us and guided us out into the corridor. We were marched down the long corridor and out of the hut the same way we came in. When we emerged from the hut, I was surprised to see that we were not in the enemy village. In fact, we were not even outside. It appeared that while we were inside, the hut had been moved and placed inside a large cavern. Before I could ponder any longer at how this could be accomplished, the white creatures forced us forward again.

We came to a halt in front of a tall platform. On top of the platform was a golden creature, similar in build to the white creatures, but much shinier. I figured he was the chieftain. The chieftain turned toward Junas and spoke in a strange language. Junas responded, but I don't think the chieftain liked what he said since a white thing swung a black stick into Junas' right knee. Junas winced in pain, but did not fall. The chieftain spoke again and this time Junas was not punished for his response. Junas and the chieftain had a short conversation and then the chieftain turned to me and said something I couldn't comprehend. Not wishing to insult him I tried to explain what happened.



"Greetings High Chieftain of the Shiny White Talking Animals," I stated, bowing. "I am Graef of Tribe Panshee and this is my friend Junas. We were just on our way back to Tribe Panshee village when your warriors there," I pointed over my shoulder, "abducted us and forced us into their moving hut. I'm sure this is all just some kind of mistake so if you would..."

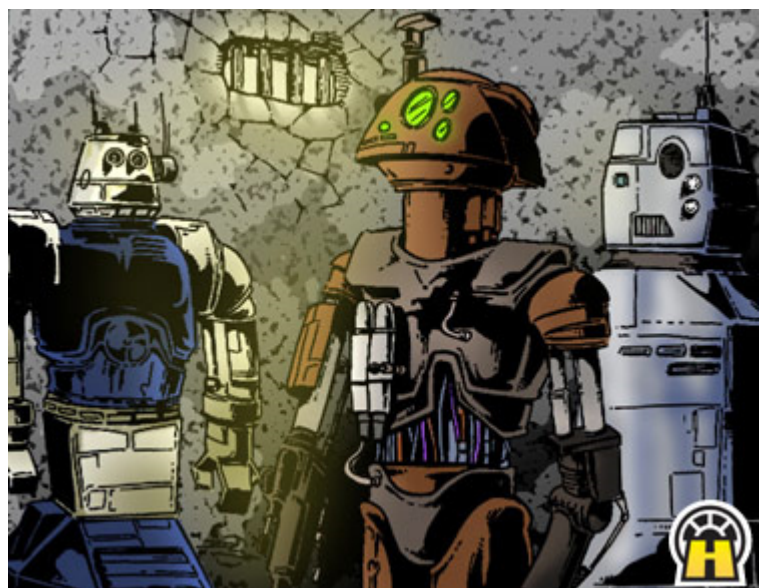
"There is no mistake, primitive creature," the chieftain interrupted in perfect Ewok tongue. "You are enemies of Tribe Empire and will be held here in this place until further notice. Do as you are told and you will not be punished. Your native language has been added to our library so that you can understand what we tell you to do. Welcome to Balis-Baurgh."

Before I could protest that I was not the enemy of Tribe Empire before today's events, we were ushered down a long passageway and into a large round cavern. A very large silver and black creature was sitting idle in its center. There were many silver doors of different sizes lining the walls of the cavern. Our escorts led us to an open door and one of them pointed at Junas to go inside. I tried to follow him, but the door slid closed in my face. I was led to the next open door and the white thing motioned for me to get inside. The door slammed shut just after I entered.

I was in a small gray room, like the one in the moving hut. The door to this one had a small grated window in it. Peering through the window I could see the main cavern and the beast that lived there. The thing had many strange looking arms, but had no legs that I could see. It had several eyes distributed randomly about its body that would flash green, blue, or yellow. There were a few smaller creatures, about my height, moving about the cavern. They had blue and white shiny skin and two blinking yellow eyes. Occasionally, one of the smaller creatures would come to stand before the great silver and black creature. Although I saw no instrument, the silver and black thing would play a tune for the little creature and the blue and white thing would dance away to go back to work.

After watching this ritual for some time, I decided that the black and silver thing, which I named the Master, was rewarding the blue and white things, which I called the Dancers, for accomplishing their tasks. What a wonderful way to work and play at the same time. I wondered why such an obviously intelligent Tribe would work for the mean and nasty Tribe Empire. Then I saw two taller blue and white things enter the cavern. These things were much bulkier than the Dancers and each one had a large green eye that looked from side to side all the time. They strode up to the Master who played a cheerful tune for them when they arrived. Instead of dancing away merrily, the Greeneyes, as I decided to name them, turned around and stormed stiffly out of the cavern. If that was how they acted when they were happy, I sure didn't want to see a Greeneye when it was mad. Although the activity in the cavern amazed me, I eventually crawled over to what I assumed was the bed and fell asleep.

I was wakened the next day by an awful smell. Much to my disappointment the awful smell was breakfast. A slice of bread with some hot, gooey, brown stuff smeared across it and a cup of water. I was too hungry to worry about the smell and scarfed down the meal in moments. It tasted worse than it smelled and it certainly wasn't enough to sustain my appetite, but it would have to do. Then I caught the sweet scent of hot meat drift into the room. I rushed to my door and looked through the window. A Dancer carrying a tray full of steaming meat had entered the cavern. My mostly-empty stomach growled in anticipation of real food. Much to my dismay, the Dancer did not bring the food to me, but stopped at a door across the main cavern. I let out a deep sigh and sat back on my bed.



Later that day, the door suddenly slid open and a Dancer appeared. I hoped it was bringing lunch, but I saw that it had no food.

A voice spoke from nowhere in particular. "This is the exercise time. Follow this worker to the common area."

Seeing no reason not to, I stepped out into the cavern and looked at the Dancer waiting there. With two beeps, a whistle and a whirring noise, the little creature started off across the cavern. I followed the Dancer down a corridor that I hadn't been down before. The corridor opened up into a huge room which was filled with many creatures of all shapes, sizes and colors, not to mention the different number of eyes, limbs, and mouths. I entered the room, curious to see if Junas was here, but more curious about the strangest things, and I do mean things in some cases, that I was to exercise with. I barely noticed the beep beep, whistle and whir of my escort as it departed back down the corridor. I couldn't help notice several Greeneyes keeping watch over the mishmash of beings in the room.

There were green creatures with horns, brown creatures with flat-crooked heads, silver things with red things sticking out of blue things, big furry things, little furry things, creatures with big fish eyes, creatures with no eyes, and creatures with things that I couldn't even begin

to describe. There were several creatures that looked like Junas, dressed in the same type of hides. Then I saw one creature that looked like Junas that actually was Junas.

I started to wave hello at him, but a big black thing stepped right in front of me. It had long tentacles with red suckers on the ends and two orange tusks sticking out of his maw. Instead of waving, I had put my hand up into the black thing's armpit, well actually, tentaclepit. The thing screeched in disapproval and whirled around to face me. In doing so, one of the black thing's tentacles slapped into the creature next to it. This creature, which looked like a two legged gold bug about two and a half Ewoks tall, buzzed annoyedly at Tuskface and shoved him back. I jumped out of the way as the two strange creatures began wrestling with one another. Many of the other beings in the room cleared away as well and started to cheer on the brawlers.

Tuskface had Goldy in a headlock, and a leglock, and an armlock. Goldy seemed to be no match for the black beast and was being crushed to death. Just as I thought it was all over, Goldy squirted a strange cloud of green gas out of his mouth into Tuskface's eyes. Tuskface broke away from the big bug, slapping at his own face and shrieking in pain. At that moment, a Greeneye broke through the crowd and leveled a black stick at the combatants. Goldy put his hands up submissively. Tuskface, his eyes clearing, took the opportunity to lunge at the bug creature. A shaft of light burst forth from the Greeneye's black stick and cut Tuskface down before he reached his target. Goldy nodded his head in approval and buzzed something at the Greeneye. The Greeneye buzzed something back and another burst of light from its black stick burnt a hole in Goldy's head. Two Dancers arrived to clean up the bodies.

I located Junas again and went over to join him. He was standing by the far wall talking to two others of his kind. One was taller and thinner than Junas and had blonde fur. The other was darker skinned than the other two and had black fur over his lip. They were startled at my approach, but Junas eased their concern with a wave of his hand. He spoke to them in that strange tongue of his. He finished by stating my name, "Grael," and then patted me on the head.

The light-haired one curved his hands inward and said, "Lon."

"Becker," the dark skinned one said, bowing his head slightly.

I bowed my head back.

The three of them continued to talk. From his occasional gesturing in my direction, Junas appeared to be relating the story of how I saved his life and our ensuing journey to this evil place. Lon examined me from time to time. I remained quiet, but took the opportunity to start deciphering their language. The Dancers came to lead us back to our rooms before I had much luck.

Each day was pretty similar to the next. I was kept in my room most of the time except for the exercise time in the meeting room. I met with Junas, Lon, and Becker almost every day during exercise time and eventually picked up their language. They call themselves humans and Junas, Becker, and Lon were all from Tribe Rebellion. Tribe Empire and Tribe Rebellion don't like each other and have been hurting each other for a very long time. They said that Tribe Empire must have thought me to be a member of Tribe Rebellion because I was with Junas. I asked how that was so since Ewoks and humans look so much different than one another. Lon explained to me that Tribe Rebellion is made up of many different Tribes that have banded together to stop Tribe Empire from hurting each one individually. I told them that Ewoks would be unhappy about Tribe Empire hurting the Tree Spirits and that I would ask Shaman Rakra and High Master Fersin to have Tribe Panshee help Tribe Rebellion against the evil Tribe Empire.

That was if I could ever get back to Tribe Panshee village. Junas told me that Tribe Empire was building a weapon near Tribe Panshee village that would hurt Tribe Rebellion really badly. He wanted to get back to his Tribe to tell them where the weapon was so that they could destroy it. I swore a Root Oath that I would help him if he figured out how to leave the Tribe Empire place. Whenever I asked him when we would leave, he always said, "When Fate smiles on us and gives us the chance." I had no idea who Fate was, but I sure did wish he'd smile on us soon.

Most of my days in the Tribe Empire place were spent in my room. Usually, I just sat by the window playing my flute and watched the Master sing to the playful Dancers and the mean, nasty Greeneyes. I sometimes tried to copy the tunes that the Master sang. I eventually realized that the Master was not rewarding the Tribe for working, but that he was telling them what he wanted them to do by which song he sang. There was a song that made a Dancer bring me breakfast. There was one that made a Dancer open my room and bring me to the meeting room. There was another song that made a Dancer open Junas' room and bring him to the meeting room. There was even a song that made the big, hateful Greeneyes go to sleep by the wall.

I decided to try and get a Dancer to bring me some of the meat that usually went to the room across the cavern. I was real tired of having to eat that awful bread with brown goo all over it everyday. I watched, the Master closely for several days to see which song sent a Dancer to get the meat. I copied many songs until I finally identified the correct one. The following evening, a Dancer came to my room with the smelly brown dinner as usual. Before he left, I played the "get the meat" song for him. With the typical beep-beep, whistle, and whirl noises, the Dancer was off. I saw him come out of a tunnel moments later with a tray full of the mouth-watering meat. I licked my lips in anticipation. My excitement turned to disappointment quickly, however, as the Dancer did not bring the wonderful meal to me, but continued on to the same room that it was always brought it to.

Unwilling to be done in so easily, I decided to try again in the morning. This time, I played the "take me to the meeting room" song and followed the Dancer into the cavern. Before we got far, I leapt in front of the Dancer and played the "get the meat" song. It stopped to consider this abrupt change in plans, but eventually beeped, whistled, whirred, and headed off down a different tunnel. When it returned, I ambushed it at the mouth of that tunnel and grabbed the plate of meat. The Dancer seemed oblivious to this fact as it continued toward the room across the cavern. I sat down and began a victory feast.

I was about halfway finished when I heard someone shout, "Grael!"

I looked up to see Junas frantically waving at me through the window in his door. It hit me then that I had been very selfish and should have offered to share this wonderful food with my friend. Feeling a little guilty, I got up and started toward Junas' room to give him what was left. I was almost there when I realized that Junas wasn't waving, he was pointing. "Grael, look out behind you!" he shouted. I turned around and there, towering over me, was a Greeneye. I offered it the tray of meat, but it batted the tray out of my hands.

It spoke grimly, "You are not scheduled to be out of your room at this time. It is obvious that you are trying to escape. Escape attempts are punishable by death."

"Wait, there must be some mistake," I pleaded as I reached for my flute. If I could only remember the right song.

"There is no mistake," The Greeneye said coldly as it reached for its big black stick which Becker had told me was called a blaster.

I put the flute to my mouth. The Greeneye began lifting the blaster out of its holder. My mind raced to recall the correct notes. There was no more time. I began to play what I hoped was the "go sleep by the wall" song. The Greeneye pointed the blaster at me. I played the last note. There was a tense moment when I thought I was doomed, but the Greeneye put the blaster into its holder, glided stiffly over to the wall, and went to sleep. I put the flute away and went over to talk to Junas who was staring at me in awe.

"Grael, how the heck did you do that?" he asked, baffled.

"I just told the Greeneye to go to sleep by the wall," I said casually.

"With your flute?" he questioned.

"Yes, I played a song that I learned from the Master," I replied, pointing at the Master in the center of the cavern.

As we were talking, a gold and red Dancer arrived to talk to the Master. It was about as tall as the other Dancers, but this one had a third leg that made its body slant to one side. I'd only seen it a few times before. The song the Master sang to it was long and complex, but it was always the same.

"An astromech droid!" Junas exclaimed, "There must be a ship in the landing bay. Grael, can you get me out of here?"

"Yes," I replied, trying to figure out why he was so excited. I located a blue and white Dancer across the cavern. I ran over to it and played the "bring Junas to the meeting room" song. With the usual set of noises, it went to Junas' room and opened the door.

Junas grabbed me by the shoulders wildly and asked, "Can you get Lon and Becker out too?" He glanced over at the Master who was just starting to sing to the red and gold Dancer.

I shook my head from side to side. "I don't know the song to do that, but maybe I can learn it someday," I answered.

"There isn't time, Grael," Junas declared. "That astromech droid is our only shot to get away from here. We'll have to come back for Lon and Becker later."

The Master was done with his song and the Dancer was moving away.

"C'mon Grael, Fate has finally given us the chance," Junas exclaimed as he ran to follow the Dancer. Having no time to wonder where Fate was and how Junas knew that he was smiling, I ran after him.

As we followed the Dancer, we ran past the Greeneye that I had put to sleep earlier. Junas stopped momentarily and took the blaster from its side. We pursued the Dancer down the tunnel that we had come through when we arrived at this place. Junas stopped at the opening to the cavern, crouched down, and motioned to me to do the same. We saw the Dancer climb up a ramp into one of those moving huts that Junas called a ship. There were two stormtroopers, as I had learned to call the shiny white talking animals, standing at the bottom of the ramp. Each held a blaster at the ready. Some blue and white Dancers were moving down the ramp carrying silver boxes and returning up the ramp for more.

"Watch out for enforcer droids, er, Greeneyes," Junas whispered as he pointed his blaster at the stormtroopers. I nodded and quickly glanced back down the tunnel from which we had come.

Junas waited until the Dancers had finished their work and then said softly, "Get ready to run."

What happened next seem to take place very slowly, but actually took place in a few moments. I saw two shafts of red light streak out at the stormtroopers. One was struck right in the chest and collapsed to the floor. The other had dodged the second shot and ducked down behind a post at the bottom of the ramp. A highpitched squealing noise rang out loudly from all over. A bolt of light from the stormtrooper's blaster struck the wall next to me. Junas returned with a shot of his own and the stormtrooper went down. Junas screamed, "Let's go!"

He darted out toward the ship. As I trailed along after him, I heard a blaster bolt explode behind me. I glanced back to see a group of Greeneyes speeding after us. I knew I could play the "go to sleep by the wall" song for them, but I didn't think I'd be alive by the time they got close enough to hear it. I caught up to Junas and we both went up the ramp into the hut. Junas grabbed a lever at the top and the ramp began to rise and then closed.

I followed Junas into a room that had a long table standing in front of two huge windows. Looking through the windows, I could see the star-filled sky through a large opening in the cavern wall. There were all sorts of colored lights and stuff flashing on the table. The gold and red Dancer was here, a thin silver arm extended into a hole in the side of the table. Junas sat in one of the two chairs positioned in front of the table and began pushing things. I sat down in the other one and was about to do the same when Junas grabbed my arm.

"Hey, don't touch anything! You might break something. Just sit there and be quiet," he growled.

I grumbled at him, sat back, and folded my arms. That's the last time I help him out of his room, I thought to myself.

"Just as I thought," Junas said as he looked at a piece of the table. "The astromech droid has the coded flight plan and is feeding it into the navcomputer. We can get through the countermeasure network and away to the Sullust system to warn the Rebels."

Junas pushed a blue button and the ship began to rumble and make a high-pitched whining noise. He grabbed onto a long stick with one hand and pressed a yellow button with the other.

"Here we go," he said as he pulled the stick back.

The high-pitched whining trailed off to a low-pitched whining and slowly stopped. Lights flashed all over the place. Nothing else seemed to happen.

"It's not my fault!" Junas screamed, bashing his hand down on the table. He furiously pushed, pulled, and pressed things all over the table. He stopped in front of the gold and red Dancer which had pulled back its silver arm and appeared to go to have gone to sleep.

"Break something?" I questioned casually.

He just glared at me and said, "They must have shut down all the droids in the complex to stop this astromech from letting us take off." There was a bashing noise on the side of the ship. "Well, all the droids except the Greeneyes, that is. Let me see if I can get this little guy going again," he declared, kneeling down by the red and gold Dancer.

Junas removed a piece of the Dancer's skin and reached inside. I didn't think ripping the Dancer open and playing around with its guts would help us escape, but I figured it was part of some ritual or something. The bashing noises continued from outside as Junas kept working. Much to my surprise, the Dancer's eyes lit up and it began moving again. Junas withdrew his arm and replaced the piece of skin.

"Damn," Junas exclaimed as he examined the Dancer, "the shutdown erased the programmed flight instructions. We can't go anywhere without that flight plan." He looked thoughtful for a moment and then suddenly turned to me and said, "Can you remember the song that the Master sang to this droid, er, Dancer?"

"I only heard it a few times, but I can come close," I replied. With a very serious stare, Junas looked at me and said in a somber voice, "Grael, you must play it exactly like the Master did or we will die." I gulped and reached for my flute. I had played my flute for ceremonies and rituals, but never had my life depend on my musical ability. Recalling the tune in my head, I raised the flute to my lips. The ship rocked back and forth and I was thrown to the ground. "Hurry up Grael, they'll cut through the wall any moment!" Junas cried.

I struggled to my feet and tried to remember the notes again. The ship rocked and broke my concentration a second time. I can't let the noise bother me, I thought to myself. A good warrior stays focused on his objective. Then it dawned on me that it was no different to focus on playing a song than it was to focus on hunting a yootak. Closing my eyes, I made believe that I was back in the Forest on Endor. All I could hear were the sounds of the animals and the song of the Trees in the wind. I was at peace.

The notes came to me then and I began to play. I didn't know if the bashing had stopped and I didn't care. All I heard was the song and I let it flow through me like a river flows through a valley.

When I opened my eyes, Junas was already seated at the table and was pulling back on the long stick. I peered through the window and saw us come closer to the opening in the cavern wall. Then we were surrounded by the night sky and the stars that lived there. I stood there in awe as we drifted through the heavens.

We traveled to the Tribe Rebellion place and discovered that they had left to come to Endor because of the nasty Tribe Empire weapon. When we arrived here, the Great Battle was already over and we just joined the celebration that was going on. Now we're going back to the Tribe Empire place to rescue Lon and Becker and some other Rebel warriors that are still there...

I looked down at my son, who was straining to keep his eyes open. "Go to sleep now, Ponto," I said softly, "I'll say goodbye in the morning."

"Good-night Papa," Ponto whispered as he fell off to sleep.

I stood there for a longtime and watched him sleep. Then I kissed his forehead and went back to my own bed to sleep, I would need all my strength in the morning to play the song that would take Junas and me back to the Tribe Empire place.